

# International antinationalism!



In this text written by Working Group "Just Do It!" of Antifa AK Cologne, the authors lay out the perspective of "antinational communism". Published March 2012.

## Introduction

The following article was written in the context of the mobilisation for the international project "M31", a European day of action against capitalism and the crisis. It is a first attempt to describe our approach of "antinational communism"\*. Antinationalism is a fairly new, German-specific perspective on left-wing radical politics. It came about in the early 90s in Germany as a reaction to the reunification of a new, greater Germany and the occurrences of racism/fascism by a reactionary civil society. What is its central tenet? Nationalism or – to be more precise – the idea of the nation itself is seen as the central ideology, the all-time dominant, undeniable category in the global, oppressing power relation of capitalism and the capitalist state, which we want to see abolished. From our point of view, an antinational perspective goes beyond traditional left-wing approaches (classical anti-imperialism). And yet, we do not like to focus on Germany and its specifics alone and instead pick up a certain idea of international networking. We want to free this approach from its Germany-focussed isolation and – especially now at a time of crisis, when we can develop transnational reference points – start discussions with comrades in other European countries. Hence we decided to call this approach "international antinationalism". This is also one of the main motivations for us and our antinational, German-wide network "Lutums Ganzel!" to engage in the project "M31", which was largely initiated out of Germany.

\*For us, communism has so far never existed. Communism is "the real movement which abolishes the present state of things" (Marx), i.e. the total negation of the present, capitalist world order for an emancipated, liberated society. The Soviet Union and "real-existing socialism" never was able to get rid of certain basic-capitalist categories, like value or wage labour. Thus, our use of the term communism distances itself from historic attempts at "Real Socialism".

See more:

[www.no-racism.de](http://www.no-racism.de)

[www.lutums.org](http://www.lutums.org)

<http://march31.net>

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different movements and different struggles emerging in these last years, which are looking for common reference points. These transnational movements – whether we think of

“Occupy” or the “Arab spring” – are proof that actions which relate to each other are capable of creating new dynamics and of disrupting – at least on the level of ideas traditional conceptions of political terrain (thinking and acting within one’s “own” national territory; the nation as a firm category).

Still, all these new movements share the same problem: when it comes to the point of articulating critique and demands, we find only vague abstractions rather than specifics. At the same time, they do retain a certain intuitiveness about the capacity of collective action.

This idea of revolt is opposed – from within the “European Left” – by the supporters of a state idealism in two related, yet polarised, ways: the first way claims that social movements can manage to become relevant forces in politics only by relying on a “moral basis”. This perspective agitates for the “Idea of Europe” as a common denominator for the different movements and encourages it against the current EUROpe of austerity measures. The second way advocates a politics, which has allegedly been robbed of its true power by “the evil incarnate” (the bankers). This perspective views the aim of struggle as the establishment of a sovereign authority, which would set the framework for the possibility of social reforms. In what follows, we are going to criticise both ways in order to show their reactionary role in the current discussions, and to illustrate our programme for a social offensive. Furthermore, we are going to suggest a different approach for social revolt, derived from our critique of state and capital. We shall call this approach “international antinationalism”.

### **The “Idea of Europe” vs. EUROpe**

Whether in school, in university or in leftist feature pages – the “Idea of Europe” is a sacred cow. Especially in times of crisis and wars, it is beyond any criticism. In the midst of World War I, the German philosopher Georg Simmel understood exactly what the “Idea of Europe”

is about and what it opposes: “The belief and spirit of internationalism [...] is an altogether secondary phenomenon [...] and an enemy of one’s own rooted national character.

Europeanism, on the other hand, is an idea, an altogether primary phenomenon not attainable by accumulation or abstraction – however late its appearance as a historical force. It does not exist in between individual nations, it exists beyond them, and is thus perfectly compatible with an individual national life.”

Beyond the speculative search for difference and commonality of national identities – so typical for nationalists – Simmel recognizes within the “Idea of Europe” the benefit to one’s own nation of guarding the latter against the “virus” of the worker’s movement’s all-pervasive internationalism. Still today, the “Idea of Europe” serves this function.

Furthermore, the value of the “Idea of Europe”, in its “idealism”, lies in its perspective on ideological crisis management. The Prussian state-political

philosopher Hegel wrote: “It is often said, for the sake of edification, that war makes short work of the vanity of temporal things. It is the element by which the idealization of what is particular receives its right and becomes an actuality.” “Idealisation”, the value of Europe, is not just some philosophical chit-chat outside of world affairs; it is a matter of great priority for European states that their citizens accept the “Idea of Europe” as an “ideal” and that they renounce the “vanity of temporal things”.

But what exactly is the “Idea of Europe” anyway? A lot of pens have been put to paper to answer this question and a great deal of nonsense has been the result. The most honest answer, however, was given by the outgoing president of the European Central Bank – Jean Claude Trichet – with the following description: “Our model was the united American Market. If we wanted peace and prosperity, it was said at the time, we needed to benefit from

the same economies of scale, from the same free markets as did the United States. This was the vision of the founding fathers of Europe. If that was true back then, it is even more so today”. Nowadays it is widely known that it was primarily Germany who benefited from these free markets and whose export surplus ruined other national economies in Europe, such as that of Greece. In order to keep the “Idea of Europe” going, they now “speak German” in Europe, by which we mean the impoverishment of the masses to enable the realisation of capital valorisation.

## **L’Etat pour moi**

In times of crisis, it is not only bankrupt car manufacturers or banks in need of a bailout that are calling for the strong state. The Left, too, sees itself vindicated once more. Financial capital, helped by ruthless parliamentarians, has sold “politics” down the river, it claims.

Enchanted by the benevolence of “financial markets”, nation-states were no longer able to carry out their true function of pleasing their people’s needs, it alleges.

Alongside such rather simplistic approaches, there are also many academic versions of the same. What they have in common is a glorified image of the “golden age of capitalism” (Eric Hobsbawm). According to such claims, the intervention of the state – including its ideological support in mid-20th century,

Keynesianism – was not a result of tendencies of monopolisation (imperialism), problems in the production of surplus value (Paul Mattik) and the struggles of rebellious workers (Beverly Silver); rather it is supposed to represent a dubious “class compromise”, which pointed at an advantageous “power balance” for the working classes. This reading does not only deny the inner historicity of capital, but it focuses the struggle for a liberated society on the state, the territory of its defeat.

Accordingly, the “capitalist state” (Friedrich Engels uses the term “ideeller Gesamtkapitalist”

which translates roughly as the “ideal personification of the total national capital”) had the obscure, a-historical potential to ban forever, by sovereign dictum, all tendencies for crisis and to guarantee the permanent valorisation of value.

And hence, the global accumulation of capital needs nothing more than to create a “true demand” in the market as well as new “leading technologies” by means of a “green capitalism”, all for the achievement of new profits. Alone the fact that the elites and bosses do not show any interest in any such pragmatic proposals to extend exploitation and oppression hints at the fading sovereignty of state authority. It is this “left-wing faith” in the power of the state that gave impetus to the Greek Stalinists (KKE) sending its gangs of

“thugs” to protect the parliament in Athens from other protesters during the election of a new austerity package. He who seeks the power of the state has to prevent its dissolution by dissolving the revolt.

### **What to do? - Determining our position**

In recent years, some antinational projects have tried to make international connections.

Although a lack of capacity meant that larger initiatives were not possible, such efforts did maintain a common theoretical frame: a clear dissociation from those on the Left that support the state, as well as the rejection of the idea of “national solidarity” (“Solidarität der Völker”). In order to strengthen the idea of a “revolutionary defeatism” (a concept Lenin opposed to “social patriotism” – the ed.) we took action – locally and further afield – against global companies with headquarters in Germany or against German and European institutions. Our

activities sought to criticise the nation-state as the unquestioned centre of all politics and to symbolically deny that a whole country could benefit from the business carried out by individual companies. Beyond that, we tried to open communication channels with those people that had already taken to revolt, with limited success.

In this context, we supported two Germany-wide days of actions called for by the campaign

“Antifa Tehran”. These actions expressed solidarity with the insurrection against the Islamist regime of Iran in 2009 and publicly outed German companies involved in dirty business with the Iranian government. Critical research showed that German businesses supported the IRI regime, which was sanctioned by the state. Crucially for this campaign, the most direct and widespread signal of solidarity that we could send to the Iranian protesters at the time was a blockade of the Iranian consulate in Frankfurt. Unfortunately, it was hard to receive wider, left-wing support for this, because the traditional Left’s reception of the political case of Iran and its limited competence to adequately respond to the events of 2009 proved to be an insurmountable stumbling block.

We made very different experiences as part of our participation in the global “day of action against Eurest” (Eurest is a catering and canteen multinational – the ed.), organised by our comrades from the Industrial Workers of the World; the employees of the Ford-canteen in Cologne experienced direct solidarity by other Eurest-workers worldwide, be they in New York or Frankfurt, who supported the Ford-workers in their struggle against Eurest and the Ford management. Maybe this was a small sign that in times of national competition for jobs, a competition perpetuated even by trade unions, parts of the working class are still aware of the importance of solidarity. Our aim, however, remains to broach the issue of international networking of wage-labourers reflecting transnational chains of capital valorisation in order to revive the question of “workplace bargaining power” (Silver) in the “hidden abode of production” (Marx).

In 2011, an unpredictable wave of practical solidarity reached a new peak in Germany: the eviction of the squat “Liebig 14” led to a permanent status of alert for several police units in the whole of Germany. Indeed, Berlin and other cities in Germany saw massive, spontaneous clashes. This must be understood as a reaction to the state fantasising about more evictions, for example that of the

notorious squat “Rote Flora” in Hamburg.

These chain reactions of solidarity reminded us of the international response to the 2008

December riots in Greece. The occupation of the Greek embassy in Berlin on 8 December 2008, which was covered widely by the Greek media, not to forget a large number of demonstrations and actions all over the world, “motivated” our comrades in Greece not to give up their struggle.

### **Yes! Antinational Solidarity!**

All these cases have one thing in common: they focus on solidarity. But what does solidarity mean, anyway? Today, it turns out to be a largely empty notion with hugely differing meanings; its definition from a left-wing and radical perspective is problematic due to its colloquial, predominant meaning. Bourgeois society understands the principle of solidarity as the selfless duty to serve the “common good”, along the lines of “One for all, and all for one”. Whether it concerns the shift of the costs of social reproduction back upon the workers via the medium of national insurance, or whether it is about the German government’s

“Agenda 2010” or other austerity measures – you can hear the call for “solidarity” play to the tune of national responsibility for state and capital.

Our understanding of “antinational solidarity” is diametrically opposed to this call of duty for the nation. We agree with the concept of solidarity as formulated by the First International: Marx and Engels had derived the basic principle of solidarity from the necessity of the international character of the social revolution. At that time it appeared obvious that only the intention to smash the whole system would enable a general uprising in the spirit of solidarity. We agree and say with Marx: “The revolution must be carried out with solidarity.”

Thus, we need to (re)occupy the principle of solidarity and fill it with left-wing and radical content. Solidarity has to be freed from the isolation of single issue campaigns; it has to be revived and updated by purging it of its reactionary and especially if its national blinkers.

We do not want to appear as naïve and overly optimistic in relation to the current struggles.



Still, we do find in these time and time again possibilities for theoretical and political radicalisation. However, the struggle for a better life can only succeed if it comes in the form of a social revolution. Until then we see it as our task to disseminate the idea of antinational solidarity beyond the boundaries of Germany and Europe and to continue to criticise and to act against the correlation of state, nation and capital – free from the illusions of the reformist and traditional Left.

For an international antinational movement!

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